

## Braintree and Witham Chronicle Review

### A lively evening with the Pirates

#### Pirates of Penzance, Witham Amateur Operatic Society

WITHAM Public Hall played host to a rousing rabble of pirates, police, maidens and an eloquent Major General when Witham Amateur Operatic Society performed Cynthia Stead's lively production of this perennial Gilbert and Sullivan favourite.

A packed hall was captivated by a medley of well-known songs and melodies delivered by an immaculately costumed cast, clearly enjoying every bar of the fun.

Cynthia's colourful production had its share of dazzling set pieces and pantomime gags, all set within quite the best scenery for an "amateur" show I have seen for some time.

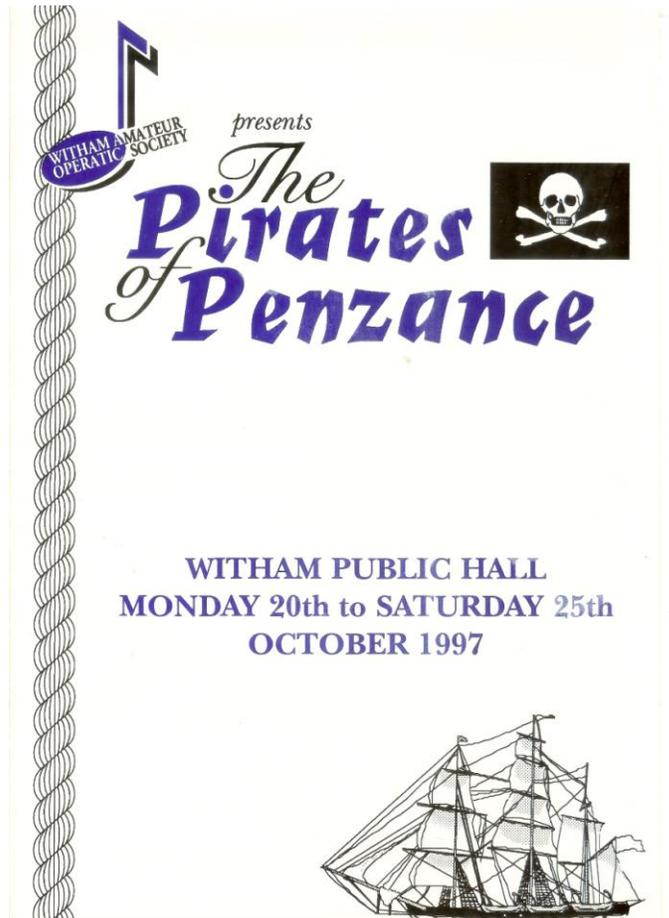
Nicholas Clough made a fine job of the swaggering P-irate King, ably assisted by Michael Dunion as his of Lieutenant, and the small, but fiery Lydia Clough, as Ruth. Nicholas Ladd, as Frederick, sang with youthful confidence and his second-half love duet with Valerie Ditchman as Mabel provided one of the highlights of the night's rollicking entertainment.

Patrick O'Brien gave us a wonderfully feisty but fun-loving Major General, coping admirably with the tongue-twisting lyrics of *I wish I was a Model of...*, while Steve Draper's Police Sergeant delivered a suitably comic parody of the morose copper while singing *A Policeman's Lot*.

Musical director John James conducted the 16-piece orchestra with skill and sensitivity, varying the mood and swells to suit each performer's vocal range.

Special mention must go to Helen Fox, as Kate, for some fine comic moments, and to a chorus of pirates, police and maidens which made two hours on a Monday night pass in the blink of an eye patch.

Phil Lovesey



## BWT REVIEW

### A memorable experience

A production of *The Pirates of Penzance* will always be popular and Witham Amateur Operatic Society's production last week was no exception, playing to full houses.

Cynthia Stead, the producer, and John James, the musical director, combined to make this both a memorable and enjoyable experience.

The overture gave the first hint of the music to come: restrained, with strings and woodwind predominating. The oboe solo could be enjoyed to the full. The music throughout the show supported the performers on stage and never drowned them.

This production was not an ego trip for one or two soloists but Cynthia Stead made it a production where everyone was important. Her handling of the large chorus was excellent and the various tableaux created were a joy to the eye. The final one was exceptional.

Nicholas Clough as the Pirate King was a lively colourful personality.

Our hero, Frederick, was played by Nicholas Ladd, a handsome young man with a pleasant voice.

Lydia Clough was a character not a caricature as Ruth, the piratical maid of all work.

Michael Dunion, without roller skates, was effective as Samuel.



Mabel, sung by Valerie Ditchman, made her usual impact with her opening song. There was something very Victorian about the way she moved. Helen Fox made a real impression playing the minor part of Kate. Patrick O'Brien was an eccentric Major General. Steve Draper played the Sergeant of Police leading his happy band of idiots.

It is a pity that there are those who go to the theatre and either through conceit or ignorance fail to turn off their mobile phones.

This was a most enjoyable performance, truly musical, colourful and taken along at a lively pace.

James **Bright**

## NODA REPORT

### WITHAM A.O.S. - THE PIRATES OF PENZANCE

Having taken part in and also seen a few productions of the Broadway version of *Pirates*, it was a pleasant experience to revisit the original style, with its much gentler orchestration, and less raucous approach!

Directed by Cynthia Stead the production moved smoothly through the machinations of the plot at a reasonable pace, and produced much in the way of humour. Good quality sets and costumes made for some interesting stage pictures, though there was the occasional tendency to rather static semi-circles and straight lines. The pleasant sounds from MD John James' sixteen piece orchestra allowed us to hear nearly everything from the stage, though there were one or two instances of disagreement in timing between stage and pit. Nevertheless, the overall quality of singing was good, and the chorus came over well, not least in the unaccompanied Hail Poetry.

Nicholas Clough gave us what became an imposing and likeable Pirate King. Lydia Clough grew into her role of the faithful and (mostly) compliant maid of all work, Ruth. Steve Draper got plenty of fun out of his Sergeant of Police. Val Ditchman was in fine voice as Mabel. Michael Dunion was a rather low key and subdued Samuel. Patrick O'Brien had a great time, as did we all, with the Major General. Nicholas Ladd was the right age for Frederic, and was in good voice, but looked uncomfortable in the role.

This was what I would call a genteel *Pirates*, and though it lacked a little in necessary energy in some scenes, notably the Policeman/Pirate fracas, it was a real pleasure to be able take in the music and the words at a reasonable pace. The audience certainly enjoyed it. And what good houses too!

John Warburton

## *Dramatis Personae*

<i>Major-General Stanley</i>	Patrick O'Brien	
<i>The Pirate King</i>	Nicholas Clough	
<i>Samuel (his Lieutenant)</i>	Michael Dunion	
<i>Frederic (the Pirate Apprentice)</i>	Nicholas Ladd	
<i>Sergeant of Police</i>	Steve Draper	
<i>Mabel</i>	General Stanley's Daughters {	
<i>Edith</i>		Valerie Ditchman
<i>Kate</i>		Katrina Brooks
<i>Isabel</i>		Helen Fox
<i>Ruth (a Pirate Maid of all Work)</i>	Judy Henderson	
	Lydia Clough	

### **Chorus of General Stanley's Daughters, Pirates and Police**

Muriel Chambers, Cynthia Draper, Julie Edwards, Helene Jones, Natalie Hawkes, Anne Marsden, Bonny Osborne, Julia Reed, Joyce Ryder, Sue Siddalls, Monica Thomas, Bobbie Tyler, Sarah Wilson, Jonathan Baron, Howard Brooks, Paul Chittleborough, Tim Clarke, Steve Draper, Alf Farmer, Uwe Haiss, Richard Herring, Ron Howe, Dave Morgan, Roger Munt, Tim Sheppard, Iwan Thomas, Tom Whelan, Darren White.